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BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETTEERS.

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BIRBHUM.

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BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETTEERS.

BIRBHUM

BY
L. S. S. O'MALLEY,
INDIAN CIVIL SERVICE.



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GAZETTEER

OF THE

BIRBHUM DISTRICT.

CHAPTER I

PHYSICAL ASPECTS.

BIRBHUM, the northernmost district of the Burdwan Division, is situated between 23° 33' and 24° 35' north latitude and between 87° 10' and 88° 2' east longitude. It extends over 1,752 square miles, and has a population, according to the census of 1901, of 902,280 persons. One of the smallest districts in Bengal, it has a larger area than the county of Lancaster, and its population is nearly as great as that of Kent. The principal town, which is also the administrative head-quarters of the district, is Suri, situated two miles south of the Mor river.

Several theories have been put forward regarding the derivation of the name Birbhūm. According to Sir William Hunter, it means the land of heroes (*Virbhūmi*),* and another suggestion is that it signifies forest land, *bir* in Santali meaning jungle.† A third derivation is connected with the traditional history of the district. It is said that once upon a time the Raja of Bishnupur went out hawking in this part of his kingdom. He threw off one of the birds in pursuit of a heron, which turned upon its pursuer with great fury and came off victorious. This unusual occurrence excited the surprise of the king, who imagined that it must have been due to some mysterious quality in the soil: that the soil was, in fact, *vir māli* (i.e., vigorous soil), and that whatever might be brought forth by that soil would be endowed with heroic energy and power. Thereupon he named it Virbhūmi. More probably, however, the local explanation is the correct one, viz., that Birbhūm means simply the territory of the Bir Rājās,

GENERAL
DESCRIP-
TION.

Origin of
name.

*Annals of Rural Bengal.

† J. A. S. B. Vol. XI, (1870), p. 111.

Bir being the title borne by its early Hindu rulers, just as Mān, Singh, and Dhal were the titles of the chiefs of Mānbhūm, Singhbhūm and Dhalbhūm.

Bound-
aries.

Birbhūm is bounded on the north and west by the Santāl Parganas and the district of Murshidabad; on the east by the districts of Murshidabad and Burdwan; and on the south by Burdwan, from which it is separated by the Ajai river.

Configura-
tion.

The district is a triangular tract of country (like Great Britain in shape) bisected longitudinally by the loop line of the East Indian Railway, which runs due north and south through it. The apex is situated at its northern extremity not far south of the point where the Ganges and the hills of the Santāl Parganas begin to diverge, the hills gradually trending away to the south-west and the Ganges to the south-east. Roughly speaking, the triangle thus formed, with the river Ajai as its base, constitutes the district. Its western boundary, though following the line of the hills, lies at a short but variable distance from their foot. The eastern boundary is also separated from the Ganges by a strip of country some ten to fifteen miles broad on its western bank.

Throughout almost the entire area of the district the surface is broken by a succession of undulations, the general trend of which is from north-west to south-east. Near the western boundary they rise into high ridges of laterite, separated by valleys a mile or more in width. To the south-east these upland ridges are less pronounced, while the valleys become narrower, and gradually merge into the broad alluvial plains of the Gangetic delta. The larger ridges are covered with thick but stunted *sal* forest, only the bottoms of the valleys being cultivated. As they become less steep, rice is grown in terraces up the sides, and only the broad, flat, and usually dry summits are left untilled, forming in the rains scanty pasture grounds. The minor undulations are terraced up to the top.

The rapidity with which hills change to ridges, ridges to undulations, and undulations to level country varies considerably. In the extreme north of the Rāmpur Hāt subdivision the ridges are high and amount almost to hills, but they cease abruptly, and throughout the greater part of the Nalhāti and Rāmpur Hāt thānas the surface, almost from the foot of the hills, is only slightly undulating. The unbroken deltaic plain is not, however, met with till beyond the eastern boundary of the district. In the Nalhāti thāna there are eight small detached hillocks of basaltic formation, the highest of which is known as Mathurkhali Pahāri. The western portions of the Mayūreswar and Suri thānas

are covered with high ridges extending many miles to the south-east, but whereas in the northern part of this tract they are succeeded at once by perfectly level ground, on the south of the valley of the Mor they sink into undulations, and, after nearly disappearing, rise again to the dimensions of low hills. The ridges on the south bank of the Mor pass into flat country east of Suri, but swell into well raised uplands near Sainthia. Further east the undulations extend beyond the railway line some miles east of Lābpur, and even south of Bolpur, where it runs through a deep cutting of laterite rock. Along the north of the Ajai, to the south of Lābpur and Bolpur, the country is absolutely flat. The hollows between the ridges form natural drainage channels, which in the wider valleys are streams of considerable volume and in a few cases expand into broad rivers, which even within Birbhūm have a small and shallow current throughout the greater part of the year.

The district is well drained by a number of rivers and rivulets running in nearly every case from west to east with a slight southerly inclination. Only two are rivers of any magnitude, viz., the Mor and the Ajai, the latter of which marks the southern boundary, while the Mor runs through Birbhūm from west to east. Both rivers are of considerable size when they enter the district, their width varying, according to the configuration of the country, from two hundred yards to half a mile. In the dry weather their beds are broad expanses of sand with small streams trickling down the centre, but during the rainy season they grow much broader and deeper, and after a heavy downpour rise in a few hours, occasionally overtopping their banks and inundating the surrounding country. With the exception of these two waterways, none of the rivers are used for navigation. Between the bigger rivers are innumerable drainage channels known by the generic name of Kandar, of which the Chilla and the Ghorāmārā are of an appreciable size. In the western part of the district the rivers, being fenced in by high ridges or well-marked undulations of stiff laterite, keep fairly well within their permanent channels. Further eastward, however, where the country is level and the soil friable, exemplifications of the usual meandering of Indian rivers are to be found.

The Ajai first touches the district at its south-west corner, and follows a winding course in an easterly direction, till it enters Burdwan at the extreme south-eastern angle of Birbhūm, eventually falling into the Bhāgirathi near Katwā. In this portion of its course it is navigable for small boats during the rains. Its floods sometimes destroy the villages and crops on

its left bank, along which are some zamindāri enbankments with a length of 6 miles.

Mor.

The Mor enters Birbhūm from the Santāl Parganas near the village of Haripur and flows through the centre of the district from west to east, passing two miles north of Suri and forming the southern boundary of the Rāmpur Hāt subdivision. It leaves the district a little east of Ganutia and joins the Dwārkā, which is itself a tributary of the Bhagirathī. As only descending boats can ply on this river, small canoes are built on its banks and floated down during freshets, but are unable to return owing to the velocity of the current. At Ganutiā, east of Sainthiā, the Mor has before now given considerable trouble by altering its course, cutting into the roads and threatening to sweep away the celebrated old silk filature at that place. The Mor is also called the Morakhi, a corruption of Mayūrakshi "the peacock-eyed," i.e., having water as lustrous as the eye of a peacock. In one portion of its course it is known as the Kanā.

Hinglā
and
Bakres-
war.

Between the Mor and the Ajai there are a few large streams coming from beyond the western boundary, of which the Hinglā is the most important. It enters the district from the Santāl Parganas some eight miles north of the Ajai, flows through the Dubrājpur thāna, and, gradually approaching that river, unites with it at Chapla, after a course in Birbhūm of about fifteen miles. The greater part of this tract is drained by a series of small streams, which rise within the district, and, gradually converging from the numerous depressions into which the country is here longitudinally divided, fall into the Bakreswar. The latter rises at the hot springs of the same name near Tāntipārā, some ten miles west of Suri, and after following a zigzag course eastwards, and receiving one by one the waters of almost all the rivulets of south Birbhūm, joins the Mor a few miles beyond the eastern boundary of the district. It is at first a trifling brook trickling between two low ridges, and in the hot weather almost dry throughout its course; but where it crosses the East Indian Railway near Ahmadpur, it is, when in flood, as wide as the Thames at Richmond and further east is not inferior in volume to that river at London Bridge.

Other
rivers.

The Brāhmanī is a river of the same type as the Mor, but on a smaller scale. It enters the district at Nārāyanpur, bisects the Rāmpur Hāt subdivision, passing under the railway two miles south of Nalhāti, and falls into the Dwārkā in the Murshidabad district. The Bānsloi in the north and the Dwārkā in the south of the Rāmpur Hāt subdivision, and the more sluggish Pāglā between the Bānsloi and the Brāhmanī, are smaller rivers of the

same kind and follow similar courses. The Bānsloi, coming from the west, flows two miles north of Murarai police-station and falls into the Bhāgirathī opposite Jangipur in the district of Murshidābād. It is a hill stream which is apt to overflow after heavy rainfall. The Dwarkā or Bablā is a long narrow stream also coming from the Santāl Parganas. It flows northwards through thānas Mayūreswar and Rāmpur Hāt and then turns east into the Murshidabad district, where it joins the Bhāgirathī.

The Sāl or Kopā rises near the western boundary of the district a few miles north of the Hinglā, runs parallel with that river and the Ajai for thirty miles, and then, turning in a northerly direction, falls into the Dwarka ten miles before the latter leaves the district. This river is deep, and its banks are high.

The eastern portion of the district is a continuation of the rice plain of Western Bengal, and the vegetation is that characteristic of rice fields in Bengal generally; species of *Aponogeton*, *Utricularia*, *Drosera*, *Dojatum*, *Hysanthes*, *Hydrolea*, *Sphenoclea* and similar aquatic or palustrine genera being abundant. In the drier undulating country to the west the characteristic shrubs and herbs include species of *Wendlandia*, *Evolvulus*, *Stipa*, *Tragus*, *Perotis*, *Spermacoce*, *Zizyphus*, *Capparis* and other similar plants affecting a laterite soil. Round villages are the usual clumps of mango trees, palms, bamboos and other trees, among which species of the fig family, jack and *arjun* (*Terminalia arjuna*) are often present. On the borders of the Santāl Parganas the remains of forest are found containing *sal* (*Shorea robusta*), *pir* (*Buchanania latifolia*), *dhau* (*Anogeissus latifolia*), *kend* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) and *mahua* (*Bassia latifolia*).

Here, as elsewhere, the work of denudation has long gone on. "There can be no doubt," wrote, some 40 years ago, a gentleman who was well acquainted with the district, "that the unrestricted clearing of the jungles has had great influence in decreasing the annual amount of rain and impoverishing the country. What about half a century ago was thick jungle and waving plains of grass, is now almost a sterile and barren waste. Wherever the land was fit for cultivation, it was ploughed up. The successive rains have washed away the soil of the uplands, and have left only a bed of *kunkury* earth on which nothing will grow. It is only in the valleys, where there is paddy cultivation, that there is any good soil to be found. To the paddy *khet* ridges (raised to keep in the water-supply) it is owing that the soil of the valleys has not been carried into the rivers. Wherever a house, garden or

mango tope has been surrounded by a "bund," so as to keep in the rain-water, the soil again collects, and these "bundcd" portions of the district become the oasis in the surrounding deserts." *

FAUNA.

The carnivora of the district consist of leopards, bears, wolves and other smaller species. The ungualata are represented by wild pigs. Leopards are not numerous, but are found in some jungles, chiefly in the Chaupahāri jungle in thāna Ilāmbazar, and in the Charicha jungle. Bears are very rare, but sometimes they migrate from the neighbouring hills in the Santal Parganas, and visit the country to the west of Rājnagar, when the *mahua* trees are in flower. Wolves are sometimes met with in small patches of jungle; their depredations are mainly confined to cattle, sheep and goats. Wild pigs are found in isolated tracts, especially along river banks and in jungles traversed by water-courses. They are mostly killed by Santāls during their great annual hunts or drives in the dry weather. Besides the above, the long-tailed ape called *hanumān* (*Semnopithecus entellus*), otters, hares, foxes and jackals are common; in some parts of the district the *hanumān* does considerable damage to growing crops, as well as to the thatch of houses.

Game birds.

The game birds of the district chiefly consist of partridges, green pigeons and various water-fowl. The grey partridge is plentiful, and green pigeons may usually be seen on the highest branches of *pipal* trees when they are bearing fruit. Among water-fowl, comb and Brāhmani duck are found in abundance. Geese are cold weather visitors, coming in large flocks to feed on the rice crops. Snipe are found in great numbers in swampy places and in the beds of rivers, and are most common in the east of the district.

Fish.

The principal rivers of the district, the Ajai and the Mor, contain *rui*, *kālā* and sometimes *hilsā*. Tanks, which are numerous in the district, are stocked with *rui*, *kālā*, *mirgel*, *magur*, *kei* and other small fish. Alligators have been seen in tanks near Mayūreswar.

GEOLOGY.

The geological formations represented in Birbhūm are Archaean gneiss, the Gondwāna system, laterite, and Gangetic alluvium. The gneiss belongs to the division designated Bengal gneiss, which is remarkable for the great variety of rocks which it contains. The Gondwāna system is represented by the Barākar subdivision of the lower Gondwāna. Coal-measures are found in this latter subdivision, which forms the small Tanguli

coal-field on the northern bank of the Mor river at the northern edge of the Rāniganj coal-fields. The coal in those outcrops is scanty and of poor quality, and as a rule, is scarcely more than a carbonaceous shale. Ferruginous laterite occupies large area in the valleys of the Mor and Ajai rivers.

The country in the south-east of the district is an alluvial plain, with a soil composed of dark clay or sand and clay. Proceeding towards the west, and for some distance before the East Indian Railway line is reached, patches of reddish clay and gravel are seen, while the ground gradually rises, and becomes irregular and broken. Here calcareous nodules, called *ghutin*, are found mixed with clay, coarse sand, or ferruginous gravel. Proceeding further westwards, the ground becomes more elevated and broken into irregular ridges, the coloured clay giving place to a reddish brown gravel and laterite rock. In some places a few feet of alluvial deposit cover the laterite; in other parts coarse sand and *ghutin* are seen through a break under a few feet of ferruginous rock. The country has thus a gentle undulating and uneven or irregular character, with rounded ridges interrupted by dips, depressions and waterways.

The laterite occurs in the form of gravel and of rock. The surface of the ground to the depth of four or five feet is composed of reddish-brown gravel, below which is the rock laterite, which varies in thickness from 6 to 20 or 30 feet. This laterite, when first exposed, is rather soft, though it is cut with difficulty; but after exposure to the air for some time it becomes hard and foveolar like a honey-comb. In some places this rock is found on the surface and may extend laterally for several hundred feet in one block, and it is then of a darker colour. After cutting through this rock a bed of clay is met with, below which gneiss is found at variable depths,

Granitic veins traverse the district in many places, and occasionally crop up at the surface, the depth being at various angles and the strike from east to west. There is a curious mass of granite at Dubrajpur about 15 miles south-west of the civil station of Suri. The rock rises perpendicularly to the height of 30 or 40 feet, and is broken up or split into numerous irregular massive fragments from the action of sun and rain. The blocks are rounded, water-worn and of a dark brown colour externally, but when freshly broken, present a light brown or reddish colour. A few large granite boulders are also found in the vicinity. Sulphurous springs are found in the Bakreswar stream about eight miles west of Suri; some are hot and others are cold springs, and both kinds are found within a few feet of each other. The

water when first taken out of the springs has a strong odour of sulphur, but if kept in an open vessel for a few hours, it loses much of this sulphurous character, from which it would appear that the sulphur is not held in solution.

CLIMATE.

The climate of the district is generally dry, mild and healthy. The hot weather usually lasts from the middle of March to the middle of June, the rainy season from the middle of June to the middle of October, and the cold weather from the middle of October to the middle of March. They do not always correspond to these limits, as frequently the rains do not set in before the end of June, and the cold weather not before the middle of November. During the months of April and May and in the first half of June the heat is for the most part intense, while the beginning and termination of the rainy season are generally oppressively close, cloudy and sultry. The cold season is moderately cold and bracing, almost always with a clear sky and very little rainfall. The heat, however, in the sun's rays is considerable. As a rule, the wind is from the south-east in summer and from the north-west in winter.

The following table shows for the cold, hot and rainy seasons the rainfall recorded at the different registering stations, the figures representing the averages in each case :—

STATION.	Years recorded	November to February.	March to May.	June to October.	Total.
SURI	45—49	1 80	5 18	50 05	57 03
BOLPUR	15—16	1 89	6 96	45 29	54 14
HETAMPUR	25—26	1 90	5 35	48 72	55 97
LALPUR	6—7	0 87	5 89	45 94	52 70
MURARAI	10—13	1 24	5 78	51 22	58 24
RAMPUR HÂT	27—28	1 89	6 14	48 49	56 52
Averages		1 60	5 88	48 29	55 77

CHAPTER II.

HISTORY.

At the dawn of history, part of the district as now constituted appears to have been included in the tract of country known as Rādha, and part in the tract called Vajjabhūmi. The traditions of the Jainas state that Mahavira, their last great Tirthankara, wandered through these two tracts in the 5th century B. C.; and the description of them would seem to show that the eastern part of the district, with its alluvial soil, well watered by rivers, formed part of Rādha, while the wilder and more rugged country to the west was aptly known as Vajjabhūmi, *i.e.*, the country of the thunderbolt. A graphic description of the country is given in the *Avāraṅga-sūtra*, one of the oldest Jaina scriptures, which says that Mahāvira "travelled in the pathless countries of the Lādhas, in Vajjabhūmi and Subbbabhūmi; he used there miserable beds and miserable seats. Even in the faithful part of the rough country the dogs bit him and ran at him; few people kept off the attacking, biting dogs. Striking the monk, they cried out *chu-chu* and made the dogs bite him. Such were the inhabitants. Many other mendicants, eating rough food in Vajjabhūmi and carrying about a strong pole, lived there. Even thus armed, they were bitten by the dogs, torn by the dogs. It is difficult to travel in Lādha."^{*}

Rādha was part of the territory ruled over by the Mauryan Emperors, and was subsequently included in the empire of the Imperial Guptas, of Sasānka and of Harshavardhana. After the dismemberment of Harsha's empire there is no light on its history for 2½ centuries, but in the 10th century A. D. it evidently was included in the Pāla kingdom, and formed part of it until the middle of the 12th century, when the overlordship passed to the Sena kings. That Birbhūm acknowledged their sway is apparent from the fact that Jayadeva, the composer of the famous lyric *Gita Govinda*, who was a poet at the court of Lakshmana Sena in the latter half of the 12th century, was born

^{*} M. M. Chakravarti, *Notes on the Geography of Old Bengal*, J. A. S. B. (1906), pp. 285-86.

and lived for some time at Kenduli on the Ajai river in this district.* Regarding this poem Mr. R. C. Dutt writes as follows in *The Literature of Bengal*: "Centuries have rolled away, and the fame of Jayadeva remains undiminished; and will continue to remain so long as the Sanskrit language is not forgotten. . . . The Bengali was no doubt the spoken tongue of Bengal at the time of Jayadeva, as it is now. But the learned and the elite still considered the Sanskrit tongue as their noble heritage, and authors vied with each other in writing in this language. All learned works, therefore, all speeches in court, all traditional and genealogical fables, were composed and recited in Sanskrit. Learned Brāhmins carried on their investigations in this learned language, and poets, desirous of ingratiating themselves with kings, composed and pronounced stiff artificial poetry in a dead language. All attempts in a foreign tongue or in a dead tongue must necessarily be feeble; and thus, with the single exception of Jayadeva's works, all compositions of the 12th century have been forgotten, and deservedly forgotten. The *Gita Gorinda*, however, is an exception and a noble exception."

EARLY
MUHAM-
MADAN
RULE.

In the 13th century A. D. the district passed under the rule of the Muhammadans, and according to some authorities, Lakhanor (or Lakhnuri, an important frontier post of the Musalmān territory, lay within its limits. From the *Tabakat-i-Nasiri* we learn† that Ghiās-ud-din Iwaz (1211-26) caused an embankment to be built from Lakhnauti (Gaur) to Devikot in Dinājpur on one side and to Lakhanor on the other, a ten days' march, because in the rains the whole country was inundated and it was impossible to move across the numerous swamps and morasses. Stewart identifies Lakhanor with Nagar, while Professor Blochmann suggests that it may be Lakrakund near Dubrajpur, both places in this district; but neither theory is quite satisfactory, as Lakhanor lay in low marshy country liable to be flooded, whereas both Nagar and Lakrakund are situated on high rocky ground, in which an embanked road would not have been necessary.†

For many centuries the control of the Muhammadans over the western part of the district appears to have been merely nominal, and the country was left under the rule of Hindu chiefs, called Bir Rājās. An interesting account of this portion of the district

* R. C. Dutt, *Literature of Bengal* (1895), pp. 12-13; M. M. Chakravarti, *Sanskrit Literature of Bengal during the Sena rule*, J. A. S. B. (1906), pp. 163-69.

† C. Stewart, *History of Bengal* (1847), p. 35; H. Blochmann, *Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal*, J. A. S. B. (1873), pp. 211-12, 222-23; M. M. Chakravarti, *Disputed or doubtful events in the history of Bengal*, J. A. S. B. (1908), pp. 153-54.

is given in the *Brahmānda* section of the *Bharishvat Purāna*, a work probably composed in the 15th or 16th century. "Nārīkhanda is a district abounding in thickets. It lies west of the Bhāgirathi, north of the Dwārikeswari river. It extends along the Pānachakuta hills on its west, and approaches Kikata on the north. The forests are very extensive, chiefly of *sukhotā*, *arjuna*, and *sāl* trees, with a plentiful addition of brushwood. The district is celebrated for the shrine of Baidyanāth. The deity is worshipped by people from all quarters, and is the source of every good in the present age. In the division of Virabhūmi the no less eminent form of the same divinity, named Bakreswara, is present in the world. Three-fourths of the district are jungle; the remaining fourth is cultivated. The soil of a small part of it is very fertile; but far the greater portion is saline and unproductive. There is no want of water, and numerous small streams run through the forest; the principal of these is the Ajaya. In many places there are iron mines. The people are in general small, black, and of immoral propensities and ignorant of religious duties; a few only are attached to the name of Vishnu. They are dexterous bowmen and industrious cultivators. In that part of the district called Viradesa is the city of Nagara; also Sipulya, and other towns." From this account it appears that Nagara was the head-quarters of the Hindu rulers, and that the country was known as Viradesa or Virabhūmi, the modern Bighhūm.

The eastern portion near the Bhāgirathi river was, however, subject to the Musalmāns; and evidence of their possession is found in an old Bādshāhi road, which ran from Lakhnauti to Mangalkot (just across the south-eastern border) and thence to Burdwān and Sātgaon. Traces of this road, which is known locally as the Gaur-Bādshāhi road, can still be seen in the south-eastern extremity of the district, and near it an Arabic inscription has been found referring to the digging of a well by King Husain Shah in 922 H. (1516 A D.).*

From the rent-roll of Todar Mal, which shows the territory held by the Muhammadans during the period of Afghan supremacy MUGHAL RULE. (1546-73), it is clear that by the middle of the 16th century the district had been brought entirely under their rule. This extension of their power was apparently due to the fact that, before and after the time of Sher Shah, Muhammadan *jāgirdars* had been settled in the district as a standing militia to protect it against the inroads of the wild tribes of Jharkhand, i.e., Chota

Nāgpur.* Under Akbar the district as now constituted was divided among three *Sarkārs*, viz., a northern section in Audumbar, a central-eastern section in Sharifābād, and the rest of the district in Mandāran. The *Sarkār* last named included *parganas* Birbhūm and Nagar, the last of which had a large revenue (4,025,620 *dams* or Rs. 1,00,640) and evidently had an extensive area. In *Sarkār* Audumbar one *muhāl* with a considerable revenue was called Mūdesar, which is suspected to be a corruption of Mayūreswar, a place on the bank of the Mor river with a well-known temple.

During the struggles of the Mughals and Afghāns for supremacy in Bengal, the old Bādshāhi road must have witnessed many a strange scene. Over it Dāūd Khān fled to Orissa in 1574 A.D. hotly pursued by Todar Mal, who first won fame as a general and then enhanced it by his skill as a financier. On the death of Akbar's Viceroy, Munim Khān, in 1575, Dāūd Khān again marched over it in triumph to the Bengal capital, Tānda, and next year the shattered remnants of his army retreated along it to the south. During the great military revolt the district was lost to Akbar, and several years passed before it could be reconquered. At length, in 1600, its fate was decided by a momentous battle fought within its borders between the Mughals and the Afghāns. During the temporary absence of the Viceroy Mān Singh, the Afghans had risen under Usman Khān, defeated the imperial forces, and occupied the greater portion of Bengal. Mān Singh hastened back, defeated them at Sherpur Atai in the east of this district, and forced them to retire precipitately to Orissa. Nearly a quarter of a century later (1624) Prince Khurram, afterwards the Emperor Shāh Jahān, in his revolt against his father, marched over the Bādshāhi road towards Rājmahāl, driving the weak forces of the Bengal Nawāb before him, and a year later he retired hurriedly along it on his way to the Deccan.

After this the Bādshāhi road does not appear to have been a highway for contending armies until the revolt of Subha Singh and Rahim Shāh in 1696, when the rebel army hurried West Bengal from Midnapore to Rājmahāl. Defeated at Bhagwāngolā, Rahim Shāh fled to Burdwan, while the new Viceroy, Prince Asim-us-Shān, moved slowly over this road from Rājmahāl to Burdwan being joined *en route* by the various samindārs and *Fauj-dars*. On the outskirts of Burdwan, he met the forces of Rahim Shāh, who was defeated and killed; and with his death the revolt came to an end.

* H. Blochmann, *Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal*, J. A. S. B., 1873, p. 222-3.

The land now had peace until the Marāthā invasions began in 1741, after which it was frequently raided by the Marāthās during their marches to and from Bengal. At one time the whole of Bīrbhūm appears to have been held by them with the rest of the country west of the Ganges from Rājmaḥal on the north to Midnapore on the south; while only Murshidābād and the country east and north of the Ganges remained in the possession of Ali Vardī Khān.* "The Marāthās," writes Sir W. W. Hunter, "fell with their heaviest weight upon the border principalities of Bīrbhūm and Bishnupur. Tribute, free quarters, forced services, exactions of a hundred sorts, reduced the once powerful frontier houses to poverty; and their tenantry fled from a country in which the peasant had become a mere machine for growing food for the soldier. Bundwān not only lay farther inland, but its marshy and river-intersected surface afforded a less tempting field for cavalry, and a better shelter for the people. The Marāthās spent their energy in plundering the intervening frontier tracts of Bīrbhūm and Bishnupur, where the dry soil and fine undulating surface afforded precisely the riding-ground which their cavalry loved. There they could harry the villages exhaustively and in detail, by means of small parties." †

At this time the district was held by a line of Puthān chiefs, who, like the chiefs of Bishnupur in the Bānkurā district, were practically independent. The head of the family at the beginning of the century was Asad-ulla Khān (1697-1718), whose power is amply acknowledged by the Muhammadan historians. "The zamīndārs of Bīrbhūm and Bishnupur," says the *Ḥayāt-i-Salāṭīn*, "being protected by dense forests, mountains and hills, did not personally appear before the Nawāb, but deputed instead their agents to carry on transactions on their behalf, and through them used to pay in the usual tributes, presents and gifts. In consideration of the fact that Asad-ulla, zamīndār of Bīrbhūm, was a pious and saintly person and had bestowed half of his property as *madad-i-māsh* grants on learned, pious and saintly persons, and had fixed daily doles of charity for the poor and the indigent, the Khān refrained from molesting him." Stewart, again writing from Muhammadan records, says:—"The zamīndār of Bīrbhūm was a popular and virtuous character, named Asad Ulla, an Afghān Chief, who, with his followers, undertook to defend this territory against the wild mountaineers of Jaround. This person dedicated half his income to charitable purposes, either in supporting the religious and learned, or in relieving the distresses of the poor

MARATHA
RAIDS.THE RÁ-
JAS OF
BIRBHUM.

* *Sar-i-Maʿāẓir*, I, 394-96, 419.

† Statistical Account of Bengal, IV 19.

and needy. He was besides attentive to all the duties of his religion and deviated not from the ordinances of the law. To have attacked such a character would have exposed the Nawāb to great opprobrium, and would have incited against him the popular clamour, and possibly would have injured him in the esteem of every devout Musalman. . . These two zamindārs (of Birbhūm and Bishnupur) having refused the summons to attend the court of Murshidābād, were permitted to remain on their own estates on condition of regularly remitting their assessment through an agent stationed at Murshidābād."

Asad-ulla Khān was succeeded by his son Badi-ul-Zamān Khān, who, like his father, refused to attend the court at Murshidābād, and rose in rebellion in 1737-38. The rebellion was quickly quelled, and he was punished by having to pay an increased revenue of 3 lakhs.* In spite of this check, the power of the Rājā steadily increased. According to the *Sair-ul-Mulakhharin*:—"Among the zamindārs in the kingdom of Bengal none was so near neighbour to the city of Murshidābād, its capital, as the Rājā of Birbhūm, and none so powerful, whether by the number of his troops or by his personal character for bravery. He likewise piqued himself upon a sense of honour and a delicacy of sentiments, qualifications very extraordinary in a zamindār. . . The zamindār, Badi-ul-Zamān Khān, who went by the name of Diwānji, had always been in his youth, as he was now even in his riper years, extremely addicted to his ease and to his pleasures; and it was to enjoy himself he had left the management of his dominions to Ali Naki Khān, the most capable of his sons, his whole ambition being to pass his days in quiet and enjoyment. But this hopeful son of his dying in the flower of his age, the father, who was already disgusted with the world, and deeply affected by the total ruin that had befallen Ali Vardi Khān's family, to which he was extremely attached, put on a *fakir's* garb and placing at the head of his dominions Asad Zamān Khān, another son of his, but born to him from his Rāni or Princess, he retired again out of the tumult of affairs and seemed pleased with nothing but the conversation of *fakirs*, and with retirement and tranquillity."† The family chronicles confirm this account by stating that Badi-ul-Zamān abdicated in favour of his third son Asad-ul-Zamān Khān.

Under Asad-ul-Zamān the fortunes of the house were at the zenith, for he was recognized as one of the most powerful princes

* Stewart's *History of Bengal*, p. 269.

† *Sair-ul-Mulakhharin*, II, 223-24.

of Bengal. Lord Olive, indeed, writing to the Select Committee a few days before the battle of Plassey, mentions the Rājā of Birbhūm with the Wazīr of Delhi and the Marāthās as powers with whom an alliance might be made.* At that battle Siraj-ud-daula was assisted by a small party of 40 or 50 Frenchmen commanded by Monsieur St. Frais, formerly one of the Council at Chandernagore, with some artillery. After the battle St. Frais and his little band retreated to Birbhūm, where they were allowed to remain unmolested and were joined by many of their countrymen, who had either escaped from the French factories or from their nominal confinement in Calcutta, where not a few had broken their parole. In December 1757 the Rājā, on hearing that the English troops had taken the field, became alarmed on his own account, in consequence of the protection he had given to the French. He therefore sent out several bodies of troops to surround and seize them, but they got warning of his intentions and the greater portion contrived to escape; twenty-four, however were made prisoners and sent to Calcutta.†

Three years later the Rājā took up arms against the British, having, with other powerful zamīndars, sent an invitation to the Emperor Shāh Alam to enter the Province and promised to join his standard. In April 1760 the Emperor's force advanced into the district, closely pursued by the Nawāb's son Mirān and Major Caillaud. Instead, however, of following the original plan and marching *via* Nagar and Suri to Murshidābād, which was unprotected, Shāh Alam marched south-east by Lakrakund towards Burdwan to meet the Nawāb's army. When, however, he was within reach of the Nawāb's army, he hesitated to attack; and in the meantime Caillaud and Miran effected a junction with his enemies at Mangalkot. Shāh Alam then retreated, finding that he had lost the chance of surprising Murshidābād and was unable to withstand the English troops ‡

At the end of the year, the Emperor having left the Province, the English and the Nawāb proceeded against the Rājā of Birbhūm, one body advancing under Captain Whyte from Midnapore, while Mir Kāsim Ali Khān and his Armenian general Gharghin Khān marched from Murshidābād with a considerable force, supported by a detachment under Major Yorke. Asad Zaman Khān deputed the government of his territory to his father as Diwān, and taking the field with 5,000 horse and 20,000 foot, intrenched himself in a difficult part of the country near

* C. R. Ellis, *Bengal in 1756-57*, Vol. I, p. cxxvii, and Vol. II, p. 418.

† Broom's *History of the Bengal Army*, pp. 181, 192.

‡ Broom's *History of the Bengal Army*, pp. 293-94.

Kherwah. His position being a strong one, Major Yorke directed Captain Whyte to take a circuitous route to the north-east and fall upon the rear of the Birbhūm troops, while he engaged their attention in front with his own and the Nawab's troops. This duty Captain Whyte executed with such celerity, that he completely surprised the enemy, who, confident of the strength of their position, never anticipated the possibility of any attack in the rear, and were ignorant of the approach of the British troops until they found them in the centre of their camp. They were seized with panic and thrown into confusion; and the sound of the firing serving as a signal for Captain Yorke, he advanced with his detachment, followed at some distance by Mir Kāsim Khān's troops, and carried the lines without difficulty. The enemy were completely defeated and fled in all directions after suffering very heavy loss. This victory effectually broke the power of the Birbhūm Rājā, whose territory, as well as that of Burdwān, was speedily subdued and pacified."

EARLY
BRITISH
ADMINIS-
TRATION

The early period of British administration was a time of trouble for Birbhūm†. In 1770, five years after the grant of the Diwānī to the East India Company, it was devastated by famine, the severity of which is apparent from the report submitted in February 1771 by Mr. Higginson, Supervisor of Birbhūm. Writing of the eastern *parganas*, which were most afflicted, he said:—"Truly concerned am I to acquaint you that the bad effects of the last famine appear in these places beyond description dreadful. Many hundreds of villages are entirely depopulated; and even in large towns there are not a fourth part of the houses inhabited. For want of ryots to cultivate the ground, there are immense tracts of a fine open country which remain wholly waste and unimproved." He begged that the Council would allow him to suspend the collection of arrears of revenue from "the remaining poor ryots, who have so considerably suffered from the late famine, that by far the greatest part of them are rendered utterly incapable of paying them. By obliging them to sell their cattle and utensils for agriculture, a small portion might be recovered; but this would certainly be the means of their deserting the province, and preventing the cultivation for next year, which would be much more fatal to the revenue of the

* Broome's *History of the Bengal Army*, pp 219-20, *Sair-ul-Mutakhirin*, II, 295-96.

† This account of Early British Administration is extracted in a condensed form from Sir W. W. Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal*, with some additions from Mr. E. G. Drake-Brockman's *Notes on the Early Administration of the District of Birbhūm* (1898).

country than the whole loss of the balances." The Council replied:—"Though we can by no means recede from the demands for mofussil balances due from your districts, yet we cannot but agree with you in the propriety of suspending them for the present, as continuing to harass the ryots for them at the present season would be attended with prejudice to the ensuing year's cultivation and collection. Should the approaching year, however, prove a prosperous one, we flatter ourselves an adjustment might be made for the recovery of these balances; and it is an object we must recommend to your attention in that event."

It took the district a long time to recover from the famine. In 1771-72 it was reported that only 4,500 villages were left, whereas in 1765 there had been nearly 6,000. Much of the cultivated land had relapsed into jungle, through which, in 1780, a small body of sepoys could with difficulty force their way. "For 120 miles," says a contemporary newspaper correspondent, "they marched through an extensive wood, all the way a perfect wilderness; sometimes a small village presented itself in the midst of these jungles, with a little cultivated ground around it, hardly sufficient to encamp the two battalions. These woods abound with tigers and bears, which infested the camp every night." Distress and destitution drove the people to acts of lawlessness and violence, in which disbanded soldiers lent a willing hand, bands of dacoits gathering along the western borders and in the jungles across the Ajai. In May 1785, the Collector of Murshidabad, at the extremity of whose jurisdiction Birbhūm lay, formally declared the civil authorities "destitute of any force capable of making head against such an armed multitude," and petitioned for troops to act against bands of plunderers four hundred strong. A month later, the dacoits had grown to "near a thousand people," and were preparing for an organized invasion of the low lands. Next year (1786) they had firmly established themselves in Birbhūm, and occupied strong positions with permanent camps. The Rājā was unable to take any effective measures against them; the public revenues were intercepted on the way to the treasury; and the commercial operations of the Company within the district brought to a standstill, many factories being abandoned. It was clear that the system under which both Birbhūm and Bishnupur (the eastern portion of the Bānkurā district) were administered from Murshidabad could continue no longer, and that the anarchy prevailing demanded the presence of a responsible officer on the spot. Accordingly, in November 1786, a British civil officer.

Mr. G. R. Foley, was deputed to Birbhūm with orders to support the Rājā against the marauders.

Next year Lord Cornwallis determined to unite Birbhūm and Bishnupur into a compact British district; and in March 1787 a notification was issued in the *Calcutta Gazette* to the effect that Mr. Pye was "confirmed Collector of Bishenpore in addition to Beerbhoom heretofore superintended by G. R. Foley, Esq." Mr. Pye's tenure of office was brief, for he left the district in 1787; but even in this short time some towns in Bishnupur were sacked by banditti. His successor was Mr. Sherburne, during whose administration of a year and-a-half the head-quarters of the united district were transferred from Bishnupur to Suri. Short, however, as was his term of office, "the two frontier principalities had," according to Sir William Hunter, "passed from the condition of military fiefs into that of a regular British district administered by a Collector and covenanted assistants, defended by the Company's troops, studded with fortified factories, intersected by a new military road and possessing daily communication with the seat of Government in Calcutta." Towards the close of 1788 Mr. Sherburne was removed under suspicion of corrupt dealings, and Mr. Christopher Keating assumed charge of the district. For some time after his appointment a considerable armed force had to be maintained for the repression of the bands of dacoits along the western frontier, and under the title of Collector he discharged the functions of a commander-in-chief and civil governor within his jurisdiction. At the beginning of each cold weather when the great harvest of the year approached, he furnished the officer at the head of his troops with a list of passes which the sepoys were to defend until the robber bands should retire into quarters for the next rainy season. On a proposal being made to reduce the strength of his force, he plainly stated that he would not in that case be responsible for holding the district.

Mr. Keating had not held his post two months before he found himself compelled to call out the troops against a band of marauders, five hundred strong, who had made a descent on a market town within two hours' ride of Suri, and murdered or frightened away the inhabitants 'of between thirty and forty villages.' In February 1789 the hill men broke through the cordon of outposts *en masse*, and spread 'their depredations through the interior villages of the district.' The outposts were hastily recalled from the frontier passes, and a militia was levied to act with the regulars against the banditti, who were sacking the country towns 'in parties of three and four hundred men, well

found in arms.' Eventually it was found necessary to direct the Collectors of several neighbouring districts to unite their forces; a battle was fought, and the marauders were driven back.

In June 1789 Ilāmbazar, the chief manufacturing town of Bīrbhūm, was sacked in open daylight. Next month Mr. Keating reported to Government that the marauders having crossed the Ajai "in a large party armed with *tukars* and matchlocks" had established themselves in Bīrbhūm, and that their reduction would simply be a question of military force. The rainy season then intervened, and the robber bands retired to their strongholds. During the interval Mr. Keating elaborated a plan of outposts held by troops along the principal *ghats* or passes to check their inroads. By November the six most important passes were occupied, a detachment was posted at Bishnupur, and another was stationed at Ilāmbazar to prevent dacoits from crossing the river. The posts, however, were forced, and to all appearance the district was no safer than when Mr. Keating took over charge. The military, harassed by night marches, and scattered about in small bands, were unable to cope with the dacoits or even to protect the principal towns. On the 25th November 1789 the Commanding Officer reported that only four men remained to guard the Government offices at Surī; and a few weeks later he declared himself unable to furnish an escort sufficient to ensure the safety of a treasure party through the district. On the 5th June 1790, Rājnagar fell into the hands of the banditti, and an express was sent to summon the detachments from Bishnupur by forced marches to the rescue of Bīrbhūm. After this, the outposts, strengthened by reinforcements, were maintained intact; and the banditti, unable to find an entrance, made a detour southwards, and massed themselves on the south of the Ajai. There the inhabitants joined heartily with the Government against the common enemy, and the destruction of the robber hordes of Bīrbhūm was accomplished.

The state of desolation and misery to which the country was reduced by these years of tumult, may be inferred from the following extract from a letter written by Mr. Keating in June 1792. 'Bīrbhūm,' he wrote, 'is surrounded on the south-west and west by the great western jungle, which has long protected from the vigilance of justice numerous gangs of dacoits who there take refuge and commit their depredations on the neighbouring defenceless cultivators. Towns once populous are now deserted; the manufactures are decayed; and where commerce flourished, only a few poor and wretched hovels are seen. These pernicious effects are visible along the whole course of the

Ajai, particularly in the decay of Ilāmbazar, and the almost complete desertion of the once large trading town of Lakrakunda. When these places on the frontier became, from their poverty, no longer an object to the dacoits, their depredations were extended into the heart of the district; and towns have been plundered and people murdered within two *kos* (i.e., four miles) of the Collector's house by banditti amounting to upwards of three thousand men.'

The desolation of the district was accentuated by the ravages of wild beasts. The early records show that the clearings of the iron-smelters in the forest were deserted; the charcoal-burners driven from their occupation by wild beasts; many factories abandoned; the cattle trade at a standstill; and the halting places, where herds used to rest and graze on their way to the plains, written down as waste. The records also frequently speak of the mail bags being carried off by wild beasts, and after fruitless injunctions to the land-holders to clear the forests, Lord Cornwallis was at length compelled to sanction a public grant to keep open a new military road that passed through Birbhūm. The ravages of wild elephants were on a larger scale, and their extermination formed one of the most important duties of the Collector. In 1790 it was reported that in two *parganas* 56 villages 'had all been destroyed and gone to jungle, caused by the depredations of the wild elephants' and an official return stated that forty market towns had been deserted from the same cause. The Rājā of Birbhūm petitioned the Company to use its influence with the Nawāb of Bengal to procure the loan of the Viceregal stud of tame elephants in order to catch the wild ones. This assistance not being obtained, the Rājā formally applied for a reduction of revenue, in consequence of the district being depopulated by wild elephants. The claim was said to be just by the Collector, who reported in 1791:—"I had ocular proof on my journey to Deoghar, marks of their ravages remaining. The poor timid native ties his cot in a tree, to which he retires when the elephants approach and silently views the destruction of his cottage and all the profits of his labour. I saw some of these retreats in my journey, and had the cause of them explained. In Belpatta very few inhabitants remained, and the zamindār's fears for the neighbouring *parganas* will certainly be realized in the course of a few years, if some method is not fallen on to extirpate those destructive animals."

The Com-
mercial
Resident.

In spite of the raids of dacoits and the lapse of cultivation into jungle, European commercial enterprise was busy in the district. The East India Company had a monopoly of the silk

industry, and carried on its trade by means of a Commercial Resident. This trade was on a large scale, the sum spent on the mercantile investment in the district during the latter years of the 18th century varying from $4\frac{1}{2}$ to $6\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs; at times the Collector was unable to meet the heavy drafts by the Resident on the treasury. The weavers worked upon a system of advances, every head of a family in a Company's village having an account at the factory, which he attended once a year for the purpose of seeing his account made up, and the value of the goods which he had delivered from time to time set off against the sums he had received. The balance was then struck, a new advance generally given, and the account re-opened for the ensuing year. The interests of the weavers were zealously guarded by the Resident, who brought to the notice of the Collector or the Government any matter he considered prejudicial to the Company's trade. In 1789, for instance, a military guard was sent to Nāmbazar to protect the weavers from dacoits, and shortly afterwards the Governor-General, on the representation of the Resident, ordered a zamindar, in whose estate there had been a robbery of goods belonging to the Company, to produce either the robbers or the goods; otherwise, a portion of his lands would be sold and the price of the stolen property realized from the proceeds.

The first Commercial Resident of Birbhūm was Mr. John Cheap, who came to India as a member of the Bengal Civil Service in 1782 and held the post of Resident for 41 years. He lived chiefly at Surul, 20 miles from Suri, where his residence consisted of a pile of buildings surrounded by artificial tanks and spacious gardens, encircled by a strong wall, which gave the place a look of a fortress rather than of a private dwelling. Such, in fact, it was, for sepoy were posted at Surul to guard the factory. Here Mr. Cheap held an unofficial court, the villagers referring their disputes to his arbitration. "Little parties arrived every morning—one bearing a wild beast, and expecting the reward; another guarding a captured dacoit; a third to request protection against a threatened attack on their village; a fourth to procure the adjustment of some dispute about their water-courses or land-marks. In such matters the law gave Mr. Cheap no power; but in the absence of efficient courts, public opinion had accorded jurisdiction to any influential person who chose to assume it, and the Commercial Resident's decision was speedy, inexpensive and usually just."

Besides being the medium for investing the Company's money, Mr. Cheap was a great merchant and manufacturer on his own account. He introduced the cultivation of indigo

into the district, improved the manufacture of sugar by means of apparatus brought out from Europe, and established a mercantile house, which flourished till about 40 years ago and whose brand till then bore his initials. To Mr. Cheap also the district was indebted for the only good roads it possessed at the beginning of the 19th century, viz., the roads passing from Suri, through Surul, to Burdwān; from Surul to Ganutiā; and from Surul to Kātwā. He died at Ganutiā in 1828 at the age of 62, and was buried in the old factory grounds at that place. He was known as "Cheap the Magnificent" and has been immortalized by Sir William Hunter in the *Annals of Rural Bengal*. "The whole industrial classes were in his pay, and in his person Government appeared in its most benign aspect. A long unpaid retinue followed him from one factory to another, and as the procession defiled throughout the hamlets, mothers held aloft their children to catch a sight of his palanquin, while the elders bowed low before the providence from whom they derived their daily bread. Happy was the infant on whom his shadow fell."

The Com-
mercial
Agent.

Besides the Commercial Resident, who was a salaried officer of the Company, there was a Commercial Agent, who worked with his own capital, supplying silk to the Company at fixed rates. The first Agent was a Frenchman named Frushard, who had been sent out by the Court of Directors in 1782 to be Superintendent of the Company's Silk Works. In consequence of a reduction in the investment, his services were dispensed with, and he was permitted to erect a silk filature on his own account at Ganutiā on the river Mor. He purchased the buildings there in 1785 from a Mr. Edward Hay for Rs. 20,000, being allowed by Government to hold his lands as a *paikāshī rayat*, and two years later was taken into the Company's employ as Commercial Agent.* Frushard from the very first had a hard struggle to maintain his position. Six months after his purchase of the lease and buildings there was a flood, which in one day swept away a number of huts which had cost him Rs. 15,000 to erect and put him to a further expense in constructing embankments. He found the Company's local officers gave him little or no help, but threw obstructions in his way as a private merchant or "adventurer." The natives charged him the highest prices for everything, and the Company allowed him the smallest.

A sanguine, irascible man, a novice in dealing with the agricultural classes, but full of energy, and firmly believing that

* E. G. Drake-Brockman. *Notes on the Early Administration of the District of Birbhum.*

a fortune was to be made in a few years, Frushard entered into engagements without calculating the cost and lived a laborious life with small profit. In the first place he paid a great deal too much for his land. Jungle lands, such as those he held, then let for 12 annas an acre, but the Rājā of Birbhūm, having a monopoly of almost the whole land in the district, managed to obtain Rs. 3-4 an acre from him. Frushard soon fell into arrears, and the Rājā complained to the Collector, putting forward Frushard's non-payment of his rent as an excuse for his own arrears of land revenue. The Collector found himself powerless to touch the defaulting Frushard. He could not distrain the factory lands or take out execution against its stock-in-trade, for such a step would interfere with the regular supply of the silk investment. He feared to take any step that would bring down on his own head the wrath of the Board of Trade, and poured forth his complaints to the Board of Revenue. He stated that, while the factory property was thus protected from attachment, the adventurer secured his person from arrest by living beyond his jurisdiction, and that, in short, he had no means of reaching 'that *paikāshī raigat*' Mr. Frushard. Nor was the latter less clamorous. His case even reached the Court of Directors, and Lord Cornwallis wrote of him as deserving special indulgence. The burden of all his petitions was that Government should use its influence with the Rājā to procure a remission of rent. At length, in 1790, he declared himself wearied out, and made a final appeal for relief. He had taken the land, he said, at an exorbitant rent; to this rent he had added the interest on the capital expended in reclaiming the land from jungle; he had suffered heavy losses from floods; his filature had been at work during four years, but it had not begun to pay. In the past year (1789) he had indeed cleared the paltry sum of Rs. 2,000 as a return for all his capital, but during the current year (1790) he would not be able to make both ends meet. 'In a word, although for these five years forbearing from any place of public resort, and living almost in retirement, here I am, after a ten years' absence from home, with no hope to return, and with barely the means to live.'

At length, in 1791, Lord Cornwallis passed orders that all his past arrears should be remitted; that for the future his rent should be reduced by nearly one-half; and that the Collector should deduct whatever these sums came to from the land revenue payable by the Rājā. Mr. Frushard, being thus relieved from the exorbitant rent he had hastily agreed to, became a permanent resident in Birbhūm, and soon a very important one. A

pushing European with Rs. 1,50,000 a year to spend on behalf of the Company, and as much more as his credit could supply on his own account, and connected in a certain degree with the Government, he acquired great influence among the jungle villages. In this uncared-for territory his presence made itself felt in spite of official discouragement. He became their Magistrate and Judge, arrested robbers, freed many a village from tigers, spread a ring of cultivation and prosperity round the factory, and founded little tributary filatures.

The researches of Mr. E. G. Drake-Brockman have thrown further light on the history of Mr. Frushard and his venture. He shows, that, in 1791, at the request of Government, the Rājā gave him a lease for 12 years of 2,500 *bighas* round his works at a rental of Rs. 1,500 a year. In 1800 the rental was increased to Rs. 3,411 a year, in spite of his objections that the rent received by him after many years only amounted to Rs. 2,163, while his works had cost Rs. 60,000 and had been in the Company's use without rent ever being paid by it. His commission amounted to Rs. 12,000 a year, which, after paying the interest on his capital, only left him Rs. 3,000 or Rs. 4,000. Mr. Frushard died in 1807, and the factory was then taken over by Mr. Cheap at a rent of Rs. 3,415 from Government, which had purchased the estate at Calcutta for Rs. 15,800 at a sale held for arrears of revenue. On the death of Mr. Cheap in 1828 the estate was put in charge of Mr. Shakespear, who acted as Commercial Resident until 1835, when the manufacture of silk by Government ceased.

The
French.

The French also engaged in trade in Birbhūm at an early period. A report submitted in 1784 by Mr. Smith, Resident at Sonāmukhī (in the Bankurā district), to the Comptroller of Aurungs, states as follows :—"Prior to the year 1768, the French provided only through Gomastahs. In that year Mon. Le Seigneur came into Beerbhoom and obtained a few bigahs of ground from a Ghussain, who resides at Sapour, named Aunund Ohund. On this spot he built a house, and termed it a factory ; where he hoisted the French colours, established guards, and made advances for Gurrahs through Dololls to the amount of Rs. 1,25,000 annually, entertaining at the same time Gomastahs, who placed Mohussils on the weavers, etc., and even punished them, exercising an authority equal to that invested in the Company's agents, who were only superior in having at that time the support of the revenue. Some time about the year 1774 he quitted the Aurung and never returned again. He was the only French gentleman that ever resided in the Aurung, and

from the period of his departure no advances have been made under sanction of the French name".* In 1777, however, we find that there was a French factory at Supur in charge of Messrs. Chaubon and Arrear. In that year they were ordered by Mr. Sherburne not to hoist the French flag, and Mr. Arbuthnot, the Assistant Collector, was deputed to Supur to enforce the taking down of the flag. Later, in 1793, when notice of war between England and France had been received, the Magistrate took "paroles of honour" from the two Frenchmen "not to serve against Britain or undertake any fresh speculation." The Magistrate also took possession of "one mutilated house in Supur, which was French property." This French factory was afterwards put under Mr. Cheap on behalf of the authorities.

Other Europeans were also endeavouring to exploit the resources of the district. Some took leases of the right to work iron, and as early as 1787 we read of a Mr. Farquhar holding the Lohā Mahāl at a lease of Rs. 765 a year. A fuller account of this industry will be found in Chapter VIII. Four more Europeans had undertaken the manufacture of indigo, and a fifth of sugar. Mr. Erskine had come to Birbhūm in 1787 with "a free merchant's covenant" and started the manufacture of indigo at Ilambazar, while Mr. Peterson, who had been sent from England in 1792 to extend the cultivation of sugar, had found suitable lands for the purpose in Birbhūm.†

Private
merchants.

The most interesting event in the subsequent history of Birbhūm is the Santal rebellion of 1855, which broke out in the Santāl Parganas and spread to this district. In the beginning of July 1855 the Santals moved across the border and sacked Palsā in the north of the district, but fell back on the advance of a force of 400 men of the 7th Native Infantry, which advanced from Berhampore, and next day defeated them at Maheshpur. By the 20th July Mntyunjaypur and Narāyanpur to the north-west of Rāmpur Hāt had been sacked, and by the 23rd Gānpur and other villages had been destroyed. Further south the rebels overran the country from the Grand Trunk Road in Burdwān, a few miles across the south-western boundary, to Sainthia in the heart of the district. The country was panic-stricken, and Suri at one time was threatened with an attack. Major Vincent Jarvis, who was ordered up with his regiment from Barrackpore, was, on his arrival at Burdwān, ordered by the Commissioner to push on

THE
SANTAL
REBEL-
LION.

* *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. III, No. 2, p. 300.

† E. G. Drake-Brockman, *Notes on the Early Administration of Birbhūm*.

direct for Suri, as it was in instant danger of attack. "We marched," he wrote, "for two days and a night, the rain pouring the whole way, and my men without any regular food. As we came near to Suri, we found panic in every village. The Hindus fairly lined the road, welcoming us with tears in their eyes, and pressing sweetmeats and parched rice upon my exhausted sepoy. At Suri we found things, if possible, worse. One officer kept his horse saddled day and night, the jail seemed to have been hastily fortified, and the bulk of the coin from the treasury was said, I know not with what truth, to be hid in a well." On the western border parties of the 2nd, 37th and 56th regiments were engaged at various places with the rebels, whom they defeated with severe loss; but the small detachments posted at distant places in a wide range of territory were unequal to the task set them. The rebels obtained possession of Nagar and Afzalpur, but after some further fighting were compelled to evacuate them and retire across the border to Kumrābād.

Towards the end of July General Lloyd was placed in command of the force employed against the Santāls, and shortly afterwards Colonel Bird was appointed, with the rank of a Brigadier, to the special command of the troops in Birbhūm and Bankurā. All the troops available were hurried up, and by the 17th August quiet was for a time restored to this part of the country. "The villagers," wrote the Magistrate of Birbhūm on the 24th of August, "have returned to their homes, and the husbandmen are engaged in the cultivation of their land as usual. The Santāls are nowhere to be found, having retreated to a place some thirty miles off in another district." In this month a proclamation was issued promising that all rebels who laid down their arms would be pardoned, except the leaders and those proved to have committed murder; but this offer was regarded as a confession of weakness and the flame of rebellion again blazed up. By the end of September the Magistrate of Birbhūm reported that the whole country from four miles west of Nagar up to Deoghar was in their hands; the *dāks* were stopped, the villagers had fled from their homes. One large body of Santāls was encamped to the number of 5,000 to 7,000 at Tilabuni, six miles west of Suri, where they had dug tanks, strengthened their position by earthworks, and made preparations for celebrating the Durgā Pūjā. They were, it was reported, only waiting for another body of about 3,000 Santāls to join them before advancing to attack Suri, and had given notice of their intention in a characteristic way. "They sent us in what is called in their language a *dāks* or missive—viz., the twig of a *ad* tree with three

leaves on it, each leaf signifying a day that is to elapse before their arrival—a few days ago, which was brought by one of the Deoghar *dak* runners, whom they seized and sent back for the purpose.”

At length in November 1855 martial law was proclaimed, and a cordon of outposts, in some instances numbering twelve to fourteen thousand men, pushed back the Santāls from the open country. In six weeks nothing remained but to sweep the jungle clear of stragglers, and before the end of the cold weather (1855-56) the rebels had tendered their submission.*

After the cession of the Diwāni to the East India Company in 1765, Birbhūm was administered from Murshidābād until 1787. In that year in consequence of the unsettled state of the country, which required a separate administration, it was constituted a district with Bishnupur (*i.e.*, the eastern portion of Bānkurā), and this arrangement continued till 1793, when Bishnupur was transferred to the Burdwan Collectorate. In 1809 the Collectorship of Birbhūm was abolished, and the district was again administered from Murshidābād, an Assistant Collector remaining in charge at Suri. In 1820, Birbhūm was reconstituted a separate district and restored to its former area, with the exception of a few estates which were transferred to the Jungle Mahāls. After the Santāl rebellion, the upland tracts to the west, which had been a rallying point of the rebels, were transferred to the newly constituted district of the Santāl Parganas, and in this way four *parganas* and a part of a fifth were detached from Birbhūm, viz., Sarath Deoghar, Pabbia, Kundahit Karaya, Muhammadābād and part of Darin Mauleswar. In 1872 the district consisted of the following *thanās*, viz., (1) Suri, (2) Rājnagar (now an outpost of Suri), (3) Dubrājpur, (4) Kasbā (now Bolpur), (5) Sākulpur, (6) Labpur, (7) Barwan, and (8) Mayūreswar with a total area of 1,344 square miles. In 1879 Barwan with an area of 108 square miles was transferred to Murshidābād, while the *thanās* of Rāmpur Hāt and Nalhāti (including the present *thāna* of Murarai) were transferred from the Lālganj subdivision of that district to Birbhūm.

In conclusion, reference may be made to the almost fortuitous manner in which the records of early British rule in Birbhūm have been preserved and discovered. The first discovery was made in 1864 by Sir W. W. Hunter, who described it as follows:—“Four years ago, in taking over charge of the District

*This account of the rebellion has been compiled from the *Annals of Rural Bengal* and an article *The Santal Rebellion* published in the *Calcutta Review*, Vol. XXVI, 1856.

Treasury, I was struck with the appearance of an ancient press, which, from the state of its padlocks, seemed not to have been opened for many years, and with whose contents none of the native officials was acquainted. On being broken open it was found to contain the early records of the district from within a year of the time that it passed directly under British rule. The volumes presented every appearance of age and decay; their yellow stained margins were deeply eaten into by insects, their outer pages crumbled to pieces under the most tender handling, and of some the sole palpable remains were chips of paper mingled with the granular dust that white-ants leave behind." The noble use made of 'these neglected heaps' is apparent in the *Annals of Rural Bengal*. The second discovery is described as follows in the *Englishman* of 5th January 1872. "A curious discovery of neglected and forgotten records has lately been made by the Commissioner of the Burdwan Division; and, singularly enough, the treasure has been unearthed in a Collectorate the records of which had already been searched by Dr. Hunter. While inspecting the Collector's office, Mr. Buckland found a number of old English manuscript books lying in an open rack in the clerk's room, where they had been exposed for an unknown period to the ravages of time and white-ants, and undisturbed by any previous explorer, having by some accident been left out of the treasury almshouses. Among these, the most neglected, have been found what are probably the oldest records of the Birbhūm district; for Mr. Keating is mentioned in the "Rural Annals" as the first Collector of that district whose records survived, and here we have the correspondence of Messrs. Foley and Sherburne, the former of whom was Collector in November 1786, two years before Mr. Keating, and the latter in April 1787. Indeed, the correspondence contains a complete account of the eighteen months' administration of the latter officer, and furnishes a clue to the cause of his removal and subsequent trial. The letters of Mr. Foley's time are chiefly between that officer and the Board of Revenue. One of them is remarkable as presenting an early example of recourse to the sale of land for arrears of revenue, and showing that the step was most reluctantly taken. In 1787 wild elephants were so numerous in Birbhūm, that the whole district was in danger of being overrun by them, and *shikaris* were sent for from Sylhet and Chittagong to aid in their capture."

CHAPTER III.

THE PEOPLE.

THE population of the district, as enumerated at each census, is shown in the marginal table, GROWTH
OF POPU-
LATION.

1872 ...	..	851,285	from which it will be apparent
1881 ...	..	792,081	that the district was decadent
1891 ...		798,254	until 1891, and that in 29 years
1901 ...		902,280	the number of its inhabitants has

only increased by 51,000. The decline between 1872 and 1891 was due mainly to the ravages of fever, and especially of the epidemic known as Burdwan fever, which raged between 1872 and 1881, the result being that the population fell off by nearly 60,000. It continued its ravages during the earlier years of the next decade, specially in the south of the district; and although there was an improvement during the following years, the census of 1891 showed a further decrease of nearly 4 per cent. in the population of the head-quarters subdivision. This decrease was due to the high mortality in the Bolpur and Sakulipur thānas, which adjoin the Ausgrām thāna of Burdwān, where the fever was still prevalent in 1891. The loss in the south of the district was, however, counterbalanced by an increase of 10 per cent. in the Rāmpur Hāt subdivision; and in the district as a whole there was a small increase, amounting to barely one-tenth of the loss registered ten years earlier. After 1891 there was a marked improvement in the health of the people and in their material condition. The fever epidemic disappeared; and although cholera often broke out, especially in the south-eastern thānas, there were no serious epidemics. The result was that during the decade ending in 1901 the district added 13 per cent. to its population. The increase was most marked in the south of the district, where it represented a recovery from the unhealthiness of the previous decade, and in the extreme north, where there was a considerable influx of Santāls.

The results of the census of 1901 are described as follows in the Bengal Census Report: "The result of the prosperous CENSUS
OF 1901. condition of the district and of its comparative freedom from disease is an increase of 104,240 persons or 13 per cent. The population now exceeds by about 6 per cent. that recorded at the

first census, 29 years previously. There has been some immigration of Santāls for cultivation and of up-country men in connection with the railway, but the total number of the foreign settlers is only 14,000 greater than it was in 1891. This, moreover, is to a large extent counterbalanced by a greater amount of emigration, and it is thus clear that the increase is due mainly to the natural growth of the population. Excluding Murarai in the extreme north of the district, where the immigration of Santāls has been greatest, the improvement is most marked in the south of the district, where it represents a recovery from the losses recorded at the last census. The continued advance of the Rāmpur Hāt subdivision is attributed partly to its fertile soil and partly to the fact that it is tapped by the railway.

The following table gives the salient statistics of the census of 1901:—

SUBDIVISION	Area in square miles	NUMBER OF		Population.	Population per square mile.	Percentage of variation in population between 1891 and 1901.
		Towns	Villages			
Suri ..	1,107	1	1,981	535,928	484	14·0
Rāmpur Hāt	645	.	1,336	366,352	563	11·7
District Total	1,752	1	3,317	902,280	515	13·0

Density.

With an average of 515 persons to the square mile, Birbhūm is more sparsely inhabited than any district in the Burdwan Division except Bānkurā; but the density of population rises in the north to 601 persons per square mile in the Nalhati thāna and to 629 in the Murarai thāna. Here the soil is alluvial and the proportion of cultivable land is greatest, besides which these thānas are well provided with means of communication. The most thinly inhabited thāna is Bolpur to the south, which has suffered from a number of adverse circumstances. It was formerly populous, but it has suffered much from fever, and the lao and indigo factories which formerly flourished along the river Ajai have declined. This thāna now supports only 451 persons to the square mile, and the next most sparsely inhabited thāna is Suri (453 per square mile), which is an undulating tract with a sterile soil. Generally speaking, the density of population decreases towards the west, where the ground is rolling and large tracts are unfit for cultivation, and increases towards the east where the land is level and more suitable for cultivation.

The statistics of migration show that 6·7 per cent. of the Migration. population as enumerated in 1901 were born elsewhere, while 5·2 per cent. were resident in other districts at the time of the census. The volume of immigration thus slightly exceeds that of emigration. The immigrants consist mostly of Santals, who come to the district in search of land for cultivation or of employment as agricultural labourers. Other immigrants come from Bihār and the United Provinces and settle down as labourers, shop-keepers, zamindars' peons, etc. Among the emigrants a considerable number go to Assam to work on the tea gardens, but, apart from this, most of the emigration is of a temporary character.

The only place returned as a town at the census of 1901 is ^{Towns and} Suri, the district head-quarters, which has a population of 8,692 ^{villages} persons. The only other places with more than 5,000 inhabitants are Margrām (6,518) and Dubrājpur with Islāmpur (6,715). Generally speaking, the population is entirely rural, even the three places mentioned above being little more than populous villages.

Sixty-nine per cent. of the population are supported by ^{Occupations} agriculture, 11·7 per cent. by industries, 1·5 per cent. by the professions, and 0·4 per cent. by commerce. Of the agricultural population, 28 per cent. are actual workers, and these include 1,600* rent-receivers, 137,000 rent-payers and 36,000 field-labourers. Of the industrial classes 60 per cent. are workers, among whom there are 12,000 fishermen and fish-dealers, 18,000 rice-pounders and 5,000 cotton-weavers. Among those supported by other occupations are 48,000 general labourers.

The predominant language in the district is the dialect of ^{LANGU-} Bengali classified by Dr. Grierson as Western Bengali, which ^{AGE} principally differs from Standard Bengali in having a broader pronunciation. The number of persons using it in Birbhūm is reported to be 575,500. Santālī is spoken by the Santāls settled in the district, the number of persons returned as speaking it in 1901 being 47,455. The Kora language is spoken by the Korās, who state that they came from Singhbhūm and are now found on the borders of the Santāl Parganas. This dialect belongs to the Mundā family, and, as spoken by them, is almost pure Mundāri.

Hindus form the great majority of the inhabitants of ^{RELIGIONS.} Birbhūm, having a strength of 657,684 in 1901, while Muhammadans numbered 201,645, Animists 42,019, Christians 819 and members of other religions 113.

The oldest Christian Mission at work in Birbhūm is the ^{Christians.} Baptist Mission, of which a branch was established here nearly

a century ago by the Serampore Mission. One of the earliest missionaries was Mr. James Williamson, who arrived in India in 1821 as a surgeon on board the *Heroine*. He was sent by Doctors Carey and Marshman from Serampore to Birbhūm, where he acted as Assistant Surgeon at the Suri Jail in addition to his other duties. The Baptist Mission has its head-quarters at Suri, and maintains a girls' school there, which was opened 40 years ago, besides several village schools. The only other mission at work in the district is the Methodist Episcopal Mission, which started work at Bolpur a few years ago. Of the total number (819) of Christians, 709 are natives.

Muham-
madans.

The great majority of the Muhammadans are Sheikhs, who number 182,545 or nine-tenths of the whole community. Pathāns have 11,981 representatives, Saiyids 3,867 and Jolāhās 1,974.

Hindunism.

Vaishnavism appears to have been popular in the district as early as the close of the 12th century A.D., when Jayadeva composed the great Vaishnavete lyric known as *Gita Gorinda*. Jayadeva was born at Kenduli, and to this day the Vaishnavas hold a fair every year at that place in his memory. At this fair 50,000 to 60,000 persons assemble round his tomb, and the Vaishnavas still sing of the love of Krishna and Rādhikā, which he immortalized in the *Gita Govinda*. Another Vaishnava poet, who was a native of this district, was Chandī Dās, the earliest vernacular poet of Bengal, who flourished in the 14th century. He was a native of Nannur, a village about 24 miles to the east of Suri, and was by birth a Śakta, i.e., a worshipper of Chandī, Durgā or Sakti, but was converted to Vaishnavism. Another great Vaishnava of Birbhūm was Nityānanda, one of the chief disciples of Chaitanya, who was born at Garbhabās near Birchandrapur.

A considerable proportion of the Hindus of the district are members of low castes, such as Bāgdīs, Bauris, Hāris, Doma, Māls and Muchis, aboriginals who gradually lost their distinct tribal character and became absorbed in Hinduism. Among these low classes traces of animistic beliefs are still very noticeable, such as the worship of Manasā and Dharmarāj.

Dharma-
rāj.

Dharmarāj, or as he is usually called in this district, Dharma Thākur, is worshipped by the villagers as one of their special village gods (Grām Devatā), and there is a Dharma Thākur for nearly every village. Those of Sukanpur, Sija Kudang, Malbera, Bela and Sarbānandpur are looked on with special veneration, and their shrines are visited by numbers of persons suffering from rheumatism, for the cure of which such a pilgrimage is a specific. This deity is usually worshipped by a low caste priest,

and, as a rule, he is represented by a shapeless stone daubed with vermilion and placed under a tree, but in a few places he is enshrined in a temple. Hogs, fowls and ducks are sacrificed before him, and offerings are made of rice, flowers, milk and *pachwai*. The worship takes place in the months of Baisākh, Jaistha and Asārh on the day of the full moon, and in some places on the last day of Bhādra.

Manasā is the godling of snakes, whose worship is widespread Manasā. on account of the number of snakes and the dread of their bite. She is represented either by the *manasā* plant (*Euphorbia Nerifolia* or *Ligularia*) or by a stone rudely carved into the form of a female seated on a snake, or, it may be, by a shapeless block smeared with vermilion. The plant or stone is generally found under a tree, preferably an *assuttha* tree, or housed in a hut, a room, and occasionally a small brick temple. The offerings consist of rice and other articles, but goats are sacrificed on special occasions. She is specially worshipped on the last days of the months of Srāban and Bhādra (August and September), a season when snakes are forced out of their holes by ruin and are a very real danger to the bare-footed wayfarer.

Manasā is a favourite object of worship among the Gandhabanika, owing to the legend that their caste-fellow Lakhindara, son of Chānd Saudāgar, was bitten by a snake on his wedding day because he had neglected her worship. They engage parties called Manasā Mangalā to sing her praises in their houses two or three days before a marriage is celebrated. A Bāgdi or Dom priest, called Dharma Pundit, sometimes professes to be inspired by the goddess, and foretells future events and prescribes medicines to those who consult him.

Divination is frequently practised by the low caste priests, Divination. especially after the worship of Mangalā and other disease godlings, when epidemics break out. Incense is burnt, and the priest sits holding his head over the fumes. After a time, he throws himself into a frenzy, and, as the fit passes off, the worshippers ask him the cause of the calamity. He then replies, assigning it to some wrongful act or omission on their part which has brought down the wrath of the deity, and stating what sacrifice is necessary in order to appease him. The necessary offerings are at once made.

Ordeals, called *Bāti-chālā*, *Pāndarpun*, *Chālparā*, *Kālār Bhar*, Ordeals. *Brahma Deitya Bhar* and *Dharmarāj Bhar*, are resorted to in case of thefts. In the *Bāti-chālā* form one man presses a brass cup with his hand, while another recites *mantras*. The cup or *bāti* is supposed to move towards the place where the stolen property is hidden.

If the *Pandarpan* ordeal is employed, an unmarried girl holds a betel-leaf smeared with oil in her hand, looks into it, and when questioned by the *ojhā* or wizard pronounces the name of the thief, saying that his image is visible on the oil. If the girl cannot recognize the image, the *ojhā* asks the spirit, whom he has invoked by his *mantra*, to write down the name of the thief on the betel leaf, and this is then read out by the girl. In the *Chālparā* form some *mantras* are read over some rice, and it is alleged that if the thief eats the charmed rice, blood will come out of his mouth. In the *Kālī Bhar*, *Brahma Daitya Bhar* and *Dharmarāj Bhar* forms of ordeal the goddess Kālī, the ghost Brahma Daitya and the god Dharma, respectively, are supposed to speak through the medium of some person. Other tests employed for finding out a wrong-doer are to make a man touch the foot-stool of Kālī or Dharmarāj, some Ganges water, a piece of copper or a *tulsi* leaf, or, in the case of Muhammadans, a mosque or a copy of the Korān. The man is then asked to say whether he committed the theft. The practice of making a man swear before a public assembly or an assembly of castemen is also resorted to for the detection of thieves and wrong-doers.

TRIBES AND CASTES.

According to tradition, the district was once inhabited by fierce jungle tribes, black sturdy men, who devoured any flesh they could obtain. Their chief was one Hiramabak, who was killed by Bhima, one of the five Pāndava brothers, during their exile. Even as late as the 15th century, the district is described in the *Brahmānda* section of the *Bhagvishyat Purāna* as being inhabited by people who were of small stature and black complexion, with immoral propensities and ignorant of religious duties, a few only being Vaishnavas. In course of time the population received an appreciable Aryan admixture, but to this day a large proportion of the population are of aboriginal descent, ranking low in the Hindu hierarchy of castes; and during the last century the immigration of Santāls has largely increased the aboriginal element.

Bāgdi ...	...	88,842
Sadgop ...	...	84,324
Santal ...	...	47,231
Muchi ...	...	41,282
Dom ...	...	40,666
Brāhman ...	...	39,826
Māi ...	...	38,697
Bauri ...	...	36,235
Hāri ...	...	27,684

The marginal table shows the different castes found to have more than 25,000 representatives at the census of 1901. The following is a brief notice of each of these castes and of a few other castes peculiar to Birbhūm :—

Bāgdis.

The Bāgdis are a caste of aboriginal descent, who are believed to have been among the earliest inhabitants of the district.

They gradually became Hinduized, but there is little doubt of their being non-Aryan, and to this day they are at the bottom of the social scale. In this district they are chiefly engaged in cultivation, boating, fishing and labour. The most prominent septa or sub-castes in Birbhūm are Khetri, Kusmetiā, Tentuliā, Trayodas and Nodā, of which the Tentuliā ranks highest. Intermarriage between members of the different sub-castes is not allowed, but they can smoke and eat cooked rice together.

The Sadgops are believed to be the oldest Hindu settlers Sadgops. in the district. They say that their original name was Gop, and their home was Gopbhūm, the country between Ajai and Dāmodar, the name of which survives in the Gopbhūm *pargana* of Burdwān. This, they say, they held as an independent principality, and from it they migrated to Birbhūm. Here the Goālās, who at first formed one caste with them, associated with the aboriginal population, and were therefore not ministered to by good Brāhmans. They themselves, however, were able to preserve the purity of their race, and to distinguish themselves from the Goālās, took the name of Sadgops, *i.e.*, the good or pure Gops. They rank among the Nabasākha, *i.e.*, the nine clean Sūdras, from whom the higher castes will take water. They are found all over the district, and are generally substantial cultivators. Many of them own landed property, and some have taken to Government service, trade or the professions. Their common title is *Mandil*, meaning literally headman.

The Santāls of Birbhūm are a branch of the well known tribe Santāls. of that name. They appear to have migrated to this country towards the close of the 18th century, being brought in to clear the jungle and drive out the wild beasts with which the district was then infested. The original settlers appear from the manuscripts of Buchanan-Hamilton to have come from Palāman and Rāmgarh, for, writing of some Santāls whom he met in the Santāl Parganas in the beginning of the 19th century, he said:—"They came last from Birbhūm in consequence of the annoyance which they received from its zamīndārs. The original seat of this tribe, as far as I can learn from them, is Palāman and Rāmgarh."

The Santāl villages border on those in the Santāl Parganas, and are situated in the narrow strip of high broken country west of the East Indian Railway, lying between the hills of the Santāl Parganas, which here approach the Birbhūm border, on the one side and the alluvial soil of the plains proper on the other. Where these hills recede from the border, as in the south-west

of the Murarai thāna, there are practically no Santāl villages; and there is thus a strip of country where Bengali and Santālī cultivation meet. On the one side there is the Santāl country, on the other there is the Bengali country; and as such, it is debateable land, for there are Bengali villages in it and also areas in which the population is mainly Santāl.

The returns of 1872 show that the number of Santāls in the whole district was then only 6,954; it is now 47,221 according to the census of 1901. This large increase in the population is due to the fact that the Santāls are unusually prolific and very hardy, as well as to the growth of population in the Santāl Parganas pressing the Santāls eastwards. But these figures do not represent the sum of the increase in this area. Many of the Santāls, particularly from the northern portion, have, owing to the greater pressure on the soil or to dispossession by *mahājans* or zamīndārs, either emigrated to the Barind, a quasi-laterite tract of country in Dinājpur, Rājshāhi and Bográ, or else to Murshidābād, there to break fresh country, to clear the jungles, and to make new terraces of rice land, for doing which they possess singular aptitude, even in the most unpromising country.

Muchis and Doms. The Muchis are the shoe-makers and leather dealers of the district, while the Doms are basket-makers, cultivators, labourers and drummers, their wives serving as midwives. The Konais are regarded in Birbhūm as a separate caste from Muchis, though in some parts they are regarded as a sub-caste. They are sub-divided into Chāsi Konais, who are labourers and cultivators, and Kurur Konais, who eat buffaloes and work as labourers and drummers.

Brāhmins. The Brāhmins of the district are mostly Rārhi Brāhmins, and, in addition to following their priestly calling, are zamīndārs, tenure-holders, occupancy ryots, pleaders, mukhtārs, money-lenders and Government servants.

Māls. The Māls are engaged in fishing, boating and cultivation, and are believed to be among the oldest inhabitants of the district. It appears probable that they are of the same stock as the Bāgdīs, for though they claim to assert their superiority, they interchange the *lukla* with them up to the present date; and it is said that in physical aspects, love of fish and intoxication, and general mode of living, there is no difference between them and the Bāgdīs.

Bauris. The Bauris, who are mainly cultivators and field-labourers, are a caste of aboriginal descent, which appears to have migrated to Birbhūm from the south. They are among the lowest of all

the castes, being unclean feeders, served neither by Brāhman, Dhobā or Nāpit.

The Hāris are scavengers, sweepers and swine-herds, but Hāris some are employed in cultivation. In this district they are divided into four sub castes :—(1) Bhuinmāli, who are cultivators ; (2) Dai or Phul Hāri, midwives ; (3) Kahar Hāri, *pālki*-bearers ; and (4) Mehtar Hāri, who alone act as sweepers. The Mehtar Hāris are again sub-divided into three sections called Bengali, Maghaiyā and Bānswāri.

The Lets, being a caste peculiar to Birbhūm and the adjoining Lets districts, call for special mention. They are often regarded as a sub-caste of the Bāgdis, but they themselves do not admit it ; no intermarriage is allowed, and they are mentioned as a distinct caste in the *Brahma Vairṛta Purāṇa*. The latter, though one of the latest Pūrāṇas, contains a good deal of old material, so that the Lets are probably one of the oldest castes of the district. The following account of them is given by Mr. Gait in the *Bengal Census Report of 1901*.—"I have shown Let as a sub-caste of Bāgdi, with which it appears to have been classed at previous censuses, but it is generally regarded as a separate caste in Birbhūm and the adjoining districts, where it is chiefly found. It is also mentioned as a separate caste in the *Brahma Vairṛta Purāṇa*,* where its origin is attributed to the union of a Tiyar husband and a Tailakar wife, and its traditional occupation is said to be dacoity. The head-quarters of the community are at Songora Bazar in Birbhūm. There are two exogamous divisions, Kāshyap and Aladasi, but no sub-castes. They trace their origin to one Asipakar, but cannot say who he was. By occupation the Lets are day-labourers ; they also fish with nets (bamboo fishing traps are taboo), catch tortoises and knit nets. Many are village watchmen ; a few are cultivators. They rank with Māls and Bāgdis, and all three will smoke from the same *hukā*, though they will not eat together. The Lets are Hindus, and employ degraded Brāhman for religious and ceremonial purposes. They pay special reverence to Manasā, and also to Dharmarāj, who is given offerings of rice-beer on the full moon nights of Baisākh and Jaistha. They usually burn their dead, but bury them on the bank of a river when fuel cannot be had ; in such cases the grave is six feet deep, and the corpse is laid on its back. They perform the *śrādh* ceremony after ten days, and propitiate the spirits of departed ancestors at

* *Brāhmakṣṇḍa*, Cap. X, verse 101. The mention of Let in this ancient work shows that the name must formerly have been applied to a much larger community than that which is known by it at the present time.

marriage. Infant marriage is practised. Smearing the bride's forehead with vermilion constitutes the essential part of the marriage ceremony. Widows are allowed to marry again by the *sagdi* rite; the second husband is usually a widower, when the iron bangle of his previous wife is placed on the widow's arm. Her rights and privileges are precisely the same as those of a virgin wife. Divorce is permitted for infidelity, barrenness, incompatibility of temper, or failure to maintain. The Lets eat goat's flesh, fish—both scaly and scaleless—and ducks, but abstain from the flesh of pigs, cattle, fowls, etc. They will admit outsiders of a decidedly superior caste, e.g., members of the Naba-sākha group, but not Bāgdis, Kalus, Dhobās and the like. An outcasted Kumhār and a Puro are reported to have been recently received into the Let caste in Birbhūm."

Bhollas.

The Bhollas are a small community found only in the Lābpur and Mayūreswar thānas of this district and the Panohthupi and Barwan thānas of Murshidābad. They are apparently a recent offshoot from the Bāgdi caste, and there is no doubt that the two communities are very closely allied. They eat *pakki* and drink together, smoke from the same *bukha*, and are served by the same class of degraded Brahmans, who also work for the Māl and Let. They do not intermarry, however, and the Bhollas claim superiority over the Bāgdis on the ground that they do not, like the latter, catch and sell fish or carry the *pālki*, and that divorce is subject to greater restrictions. It appears, however, that fishing is still the occupation of the poorer members of the community. The others are mostly non-occupancy ryots and day-labourers. Many of them are dacoits, thieves, and clubmen or *lāthiāls*; a few work as carpenters, potters and village watchmen.*

Jadupetias.

The Jadupetiās are a community found only in this district and in Mānbhūm and the Santāl Parganas, who occupy a place midway between Hinduism and Muhammadanism. They say they are the descendants of a Muhammadan *fakir* by a low caste Hindu woman. They believe in Allah, but also worship Kālī, Manasā, Devī and other deities of the Hindu pantheon. Hindu priests sometimes officiate when they offer sacrifices to Kālī. They practise circumcision and bury their dead. On the other hand, many of them kill animals as the Hindus do, by severing the head from the body, and shave off their beards. Many again bear Hindu names, and their married women mark the parting of their hair with vermilion. Some also abstain from beef. They have a Kāmī who officiates at their marriages, but not necessarily

* *Bengal Census Report of 1901*, p. 408.

at their burial services. By profession they are brass-workers and make trinkets, gongs, weights, etc., of that metal. Some again are mendicants; they draw pictures of persons recently dead and exhibit them to the bereaved relatives who give them presents.*

At Suri there is a Muhammadan association known as the Anjumān Mazukare Islāmīa, the object of which is the social and educational advancement of the Muhammadan community. At Bhubandāngā near Bolpur there is a Brāhmo Samāj building, known as the Sāntiniketan, which is associated with the great Brāhmo leader, Debendra Nath Tagore; in connection with this a Brāhmo School is maintained. In the village of Fatehpur in the Rāmpur Hāt sub-division there is a semi-literary society called the Bāndhab Samiti, the members of which have formed a co-operative credit society. There are also some Hari Sabhās and Brāhmo Samājes dealing with religious matters, among which the Brāhmo Samāj of Suri and Nalhāti may be mentioned.

It is not easy to draw the line between village officials properly so called, zamīndāri servants, village professional men and village artisans. Formerly persons falling under all those categories were looked upon as servants of the whole village, and as such were paid by *chākran* (or service) grants of land, and this is still the case to a certain extent. In most of these cases, the *chākran* grants are of the nature of a general retainer of the services of the grantee for the village; and specific work for an individual villager is paid for separately.

Some traces of the old indigenous village system are still found in the recognition of the village headman or Mandal. Originally he was responsible for the village rent, and it was his duty to assist in the collection of revenue and help the zamīndār in measuring and ascertaining the boundaries of the lands held by each ryot. He was generally responsible for the peace of the village and for bringing to justice all kinds of malefactors, and he was recognized as arbitrator of village disputes and as the constitutional referee in all matters affecting the village community. There was no salary attached to the post, but the Mandal was sometimes allowed to hold his lands at a slightly lower rate of rent than the other ryots. His office in course of time became hereditary, and it is so still; but his position is now of much less importance than it originally was. He is still looked to by the zamīndār to assist in the realization of rent; but, except in small agricultural villages, he no longer possesses the influence he did

* Bengal Census Report of 1901, pp. 412-14.

among his fellow villagers. He commands respect, however, in the village, and receives gratuities at the time of marriages. On *punya* day, i.e., the first rent-day of the year, he has the privilege of paying rent first, and gets some sweetmeats, a garland of flowers, and a sandal mark on the forehead. No ryot is allowed to pay before the Mandal does, and no appointment connected with the village is obtainable without his consent.

Mānjhi. The *mānjhi* is the headman in Santāl villages, who presides at village meetings, decides petty disputes, and attends marriages and religious ceremonies.

Kayāl. In almost every village there is a *kayāl* or weighman, who pays Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 to the zamindār for the right to weigh grain in it. He is remunerated by receiving from each vendor one *anjali* of rice for each maund that he weighs, i.e., the quantity contained in both hands, or a little less than one *kutcha* seer.

Other village servants. The *simānādār* is a watcher of the village boundaries, who is supposed to bring to notice any encroachments on them. The *āgalda* is the field-watcher, who gets a portion of the paddy crop which he has watched as his salary. The *parohit* performs religious ceremonies for the villagers, and the *bāgal* is a cowherd appointed by them to look after their herds. Other village servants are the blacksmith, washerman, barber, and potter, who, in addition to their own special work, are bound to assist in certain ceremonies and are remunerated by small grants of *chākriān* lands. The Kāmār or blacksmith, for instance, sacrifices goats, the Kumhār or potter supplies vessels at the village festivals, the barber attends at *pūjās*, the Mālis supply garlands of flowers for offerings to the village idols.

Landlord's servants. The landlord's servants, who also pay an important part in village life, are as follows: The *Naib* is the rent collector of an estate, who looks after the *gumāshṭas*, checks their accounts, and generally supervises the management of the estate. The *gumāshṭā* is the rent-collector of one or more villages, and is the most important personality in village life. Sometimes there are two *gumāshṭas* for a village or group of villages, viz., the *mā-gumāshṭa* who collects rents, and the *ṣaṇḍāri gumāshṭa* who attends to litigation connected with his master's land and tenants. Other servants of the zamindār are the *rausgir* or *ḍāin's* chain-man, the *hatchama* or *park*, i.e., a peon who assists the *gumāshṭa* in collecting rents, and the *astaprahari* who serves as watchman at the zamindār's *kachahri* and also assists the *gumāshṭa*.

Food. The ordinary food of the people consists principally of rice, pulses (*dal*), fish, milk and vegetables. The food and the time for taking it vary according to circumstances, but the general

practice is to take two meals, one in the day at about 10 or 11 A.M., and the other at night at about 8 or 9 P.M. The meals consist of the articles mentioned above, except that some persons take bread or *luchi*, i.e., bread fried in *ghi*, at night. As a rule, also, a light repast, usually consisting of sweetmeats, is taken in the morning and in the evening.

The houses fall under three main heads, viz., *pākā* or houses made of brick or masonry, *kauchā* or houses thatched with straw, and *khaprā* or houses with tiled roofs. The *pākā* houses again are generally of three kinds, viz., those roofed with beams and rafters made of wood, those in which the roof is supported by girders, and those in which it rests on arches; there are, however, very few of the latter two classes. The walls of these houses are either constructed of bricks made with *sukhi* and lime or of bricks made of mud. The thatched houses may be divided into three classes according to their thatching, viz., *chchāā*, *duchālā* and *chauchālā*, i.e., houses with one, two or four thatches. Some of the walls are made of clay, some of unburnt bricks, some of branches of trees and bushes smeared over with clay, and others of wood and clay. Houses of the latter two kinds are called *jāhībār* or *garābār*, and the last kind is seen in places subject to inundation. Houses thatched with straw are common all over the district; in towns and populous villages masonry buildings are met with in fairly large numbers.

• The houses are mainly of the Lower Bengal style of architecture with the ridge and eave lines curved and the thatch very thick. The reason for this style of architecture seems to be that in this part of the country the rainfall is so heavy that, unless very thick thatch is put on, water leaks through, especially along the corner beams of a *chauchālā* or four-thatched house.

The ordinary clothing of a gentleman appearing at a social gathering in the cold weather consists of a *dhuti* or waistcloth of cotton, a shirt and coat, a shawl, and a pair of stockings and shoes. In other seasons of the year a *dhuti*, shirt or coat, a *chādar* and shoes are worn. When appearing at office, the clothing consists of pantaloons, a shirt, a *chapkān*, a *chādar*, and a pair of stockings and shoes; persons of somewhat higher position use *chogās*, or loose overcoats, instead of *chādars*. The ordinary clothing of a man of the middle classes consists of a *dhuti*, *chādar* and a pair of shoes or slippers; shirts and coats are also occasionally used. A cultivator wears merely a coarse *dhuti* and a scarf (*gāmbhā*) thrown over the shoulders or wrapped around the waist. Men of the lower classes have a coarse *dhuti* only. In the cold weather shawls and various wrappers are used, such as the *banāts* made of serge

or broadcloth, the *dhusā* and *bālāposh* made of cotton and cloth, the *garbhasuti* woven with tusser and cotton thread, and the *gilap* or *pāchhūri*, which is a double *chādar* made of coarse cloth. The dress of the women generally consists of a *sāri* only; but in rich families the use of bodices and wrappers in the winter has been introduced. As a rule, females, with the exception of prostitutes, do not use shoes, shawls, or other garments used by the males.

AMUSE-
MENTS.

The amusements of the people consist chiefly of the *jātrā*, which is a theatrical entertainment given in the open air, *bāithaki* songs, i.e., songs in the *baithak* or general sitting-room, and dancing. All of these are accompanied by both vocal and instrumental music. The Hindus also are very fond of *Harisankirtan*, i.e., they sing and dance in the name of Hari (God). Sometimes *Harisankirtan* continues without intermission for several days and nights, and is called, according to its duration, *ahorātrā* (one day and night), *chabbisprahar* (3 days and nights), *pancharātrā* (5 days and nights) and *nabarātrā* (9 days and nights).

CHAPTER IV.

PUBLIC HEALTH.

BIRBHUM has long been noted for its salubrity, and, though it has suffered from time to time from severe epidemics of fever, is regarded as one of the healthiest districts in Bengal. Its healthiness is largely due to its physical formation, for the surface is undulating, the soil is porous, and the rivers, streams and valleys that traverse the country afford ample facilities for drainage. Here, however, as in other parts of Bengal, the staple crop is rice, which requires a large amount of water for its successful cultivation. Although, therefore, the nature of the soil and the formation of the land are unfavourable to the lodgement of water, during the paddy season every effort is made to retain it in the fields, and when it lies stagnant, it becomes the breeding ground of malaria-breeding mosquitoes. Tanks, moreover, are unusually numerous, the villages being remarkable for the abundance of small tanks dotted round them in a small compass. These tanks are lined with an almost impervious coating of black clay and silt; and the water in them becomes low in the hot weather, and, as they are rarely cleaned, very dirty. The people chiefly depend upon such tanks for their water-supply.

GENERAL
CONDI-
TIONS.

So far as the records of the district extend, they show Birbhūm to have been singularly free from the ravages of epidemic fever. The first and worst epidemic of which there is any record was that known as the Burdwan fever, which caused a very great loss of population, the mortality during the few years in which it raged being estimated at 350,000.* From this loss of population the district is only now recovering. The fever first made its appearance in April 1871 in the alluvial tract of country in the south-east adjoining Burdwan. By October 1871 it had spread to most of the villages east of the railway, as far north as the Lābpur thāna, and also to a few villages south-west of the line. As the cold weather advanced,

PRINCIPAL
DISEASES.
Burdwan
fever.

* *Bengal Census Report of 1881*, p. 60.